

Wasps get control over clover root weevil

By HOWARD KEENE

THE effect of clover root weevil on the country's lucrative clover seed crops is still an unknown quantity, but an introduced parasitic wasp is proving reasonably effective in controlling the weevil, says AgResearch entomologist Mark McNeill.

Speaking at the Foundation for Arable Research (FAR) annual field day at Chertsey in Mid Canterbury, he said clover root weevil (CRW) was first discovered in the North Island in 1996 and was now well established in the North Island and upper South Island with isolated populations found in the rest of the South Island.

It is considered the most serious insect pest of clover in the country.

"A lot of effort has gone into quantifying its impact on dairy and sheep pasture, but its effect on clover crops is still an unknown quantity."

He said the weevils were "egg laying machines" when they were feeding on clover. However it was the larvae that did the most damage when they burrowed down and attacked the root nodules.

When populations got very high, clover could disappear from paddocks in the short term, he said.

"In a pasture situation where you've had 30 per cent clover previously, you might only have 10 per cent [after a CRW attack]."

Mr McNeill said a broad-spectrum insecticide on the weevil only gave short term gain, and work was yet to be done on control of the larval stage.

However a parasitic wasp introduced from Ireland was likely to be a fairly effective control.

Release of the wasp in North Canterbury had "done a really good job", and wasp numbers would continue to build up.

FAR is keen to find out how far CRW has spread, and would like to hear from farmers who have it.



AgResearch entomologist Mark McNeill with models of the clover root weevil, left, and an introduced parasitic wasp successfully used for biological control of the weevil.